

Central Intelligence Agency



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**DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE**

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South Pacific:  
Antinuclear Initiatives Resurface

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Summary

Consideration by the South Pacific island nations over the past year of a regional nuclear-free zone has taken on greater strategic implications for the United States with the advent of a strongly antinuclear Labor government in New Zealand. Although Wellington is not proselytizing among the islanders, its antinuclear rhetoric gives encouragement to those who are.

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The most prominent regional leaders are concerned that New Zealand's stance could inhibit US military activity in the region, and this militates against the New Zealand antinuclear example. We believe the islanders will opt for a moderate Australian nuclear-free zone formulation that would safeguard US security interests in the area.

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This memorandum was prepared by  Southeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 15 October 1984 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, Southeast Asia Division, OEA,

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### An Australian Proposal

Antinuclear initiatives in the South Pacific resurfaced this year at the annual meeting of the South Pacific Forum in late August when Australia submitted a proposal for a regional nuclear-free zone.\* The proposal was a follow-on to one tabled by Australia last year but remanded to it for refinement and resubmission. [ ]

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The nub of the Australian concept is a ban on nuclear testing and on the storage and disposal of nuclear waste in the Pacific. The Australians believe their formulation safeguards US security interests by including a specific provision for unimpeded transit by ships on the high seas. In discussions with the islanders over the past year, however, the Australians have found growing reservations among the South Pacific island nations over a regional zone, based on a concern that such an arrangement might lessen their sovereignty. The final Australian proposal left it to each state to decide on port access. [ ]

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Antinuclear sentiment in the South Pacific grew out of the US testing program in Micronesia after World War II and has been reinforced by testing in French Polynesia that continues today. Objections to the French program have been sharpened by a recent announcement that nuclear tests will continue through the end of the century.\*\* A tendency in the 1970s to condemn all nuclear use--including nuclear power--has ebbed in favor of concentration against the French nuclear testing program. An undercurrent of indiscriminate opposition to all things nuclear remains, however, which could take encouragement from the antinuclear stance of the new Labor government in New Zealand. [ ]

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\* The 13-member South Pacific Forum comprises the nine independent South Pacific island nations--Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Western Samoa, Vanuatu, Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Nauru--plus the New Zealand dependencies of Niue and the Cook Islands. Australia and New Zealand are members because of their proximity and longstanding ties to the South Pacific and because the islanders look to them as continuing sources of aid. [ ]

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\*\* France, stung by continuous criticism of its testing program, last year invited the South Pacific Forum to send an inspection team of scientists to the test site on Mururoa Atoll. A team of Australians, New Zealanders, and Papua New Guineans visited in October 1983 and concluded that there is no immediate danger from the program. Because of some structural damage to the atoll, however, they expressed doubts about future leakage. Taking note of the uncertain future, the South Pacific countries reiterated their strong opposition to continued French nuclear testing in the area in their annual regional meeting in August 1984. [ ]

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### The New Zealand Challenge

New Zealand Prime Minister Lange, on taking office in July, imposed a ban on port calls by nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed ships in accordance with Labor Party policy. Canberra saw a danger of the South Pacific becoming infected with the New Zealand antinuclear mood. Contrary to some expectations, however, Lange did not attempt to push New Zealand's policy at the Forum meeting, accepting instead the moderate Australian nuclear-free zone proposal. [ ]

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Furthermore, Australian fears that the island nations might become attracted to the New Zealand example on port visits have not materialized. On the contrary, some island leaders have expressed concern that New Zealand's ban on port calls might damage ANZUS and consequently undercut the security guarantees that they believe extend at least informally to their region. At the Forum meeting, both Fijian Prime Minister Mara and Papua New Guinean Prime Minister Somare voiced these concerns to Lange and impressed on him the importance they attach to US protection. Australian Prime Minister Hawke has added weight to their arguments with a public statement that ANZUS has worked to Australia's benefit for over 30 years and that Australia would continue to welcome US naval ships. [ ]

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Disapproval of the New Zealand port ban is not universal in the South Pacific, however; only Fiji, Western Samoa, and Tonga welcome US naval visits. At the opposite extreme, there is no give in Vanuatu's ban on ship entry unless each vessel is declared not to be carrying nuclear weapons. The other island nations--particularly Papua New Guinea and the Solomons--have no definitive policy on port access and make decisions case by case. Even short of a New Zealand effort to proselytize, continued antinuclear rhetoric from Wellington could--particularly in view of the uncertainty of some island nations on how to handle the question of port access--shift attention to US ship visits from a focus on French nuclear testing and plans for dumping radioactive waste. [ ]

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### Prospects: A Likely Consensus

The islanders have given themselves a year to draft a nuclear-free zone treaty for consideration at the next Forum session. This unhurried pace--plus the unemotional discussion so far--underscores the general conservatism of the South Pacific island nations and provides some assurance that the antinuclear stance of the New Zealand Labor government will not be imitated by its South Pacific island neighbors. Furthermore, the wide range of opinion--or lack of strong feelings--on port visits by nuclear ships inclines the Forum nations to adopt the moderate Australian formulation for a regional nuclear-free zone. Decisions on regional issues in the South Pacific are traditionally reached through consensus, and the Australian draft appears to satisfy the need for a compromise position. [ ]

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Some risk remains that consideration of the Australian proposal and publicity of the New Zealand port ban could produce unwonted attention to antinuclear sentiment, giving regional hardliners an opening to press their views. Moscow has sought to encourage such a development by giving heavy propaganda support to the Lange government's antinuclear position. This effort is unlikely, however, to win converts among the South Pacific nations. Their conservative, Christian, and Western-oriented societies are the basis for an aversion to the Soviets that needs no outside encouragement. There is no Soviet embassy in the South Pacific despite persistent Soviet efforts to establish a diplomatic presence. Fiji's recent rebuff to a Soviet approach for a fishing arrangement involving profit sharing with Fiji typifies the prevalent regional negative attitude, one that so far has blocked any Soviet efforts to reduce US stature in the area.

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**APPENDIX****One Cloud: Fishing Rights**

A sharp difference of opinion between the South Pacific island nations and the United States over fishing rights retains--despite efforts toward an accommodation--some potential for souring the area's disposition toward a nuclear-free zone formulation that accords with US security interests. [ ]

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The United States recognizes the 200-mile exclusive economic zones that all of the island nations have declared; these overlapping zones form a band across the South Pacific (see map). The United States does not, however, recognize the island states' jurisdiction over fishing for highly migratory species--such as tuna. The resources-poor island states have been highly offended by the US position because they see revenues from licensing foreign fishing vessels in their economic zones as one of their few means of earning foreign exchange. [ ]

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The US tuna fleet has been extending its operations westward into the central and western South Pacific as tuna stocks in its traditional fishing area between the West Coast and American Samoa have become less plentiful. Annoyance over alleged US intrusions into territorial waters came to a head two months before the latest Forum meeting when the Solomon Islands seized a US tuna boat in its waters and the United States in retaliation embargoed tuna imports from the Solomons. A proposal by the Solomons to the South Pacific Forum to ban US fishing in Forum waters was defused by Australia into an expression of regret over the Solomons-US dispute and a hope for settlement through negotiations. Nevertheless, Fiji's Foreign Minister has warned US officials that islander perceptions of the United States bullying a small Pacific state over tuna could portend a deterioration in the US image in the area.\* [ ]

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\* A compromise may be in the offing, however, on the jurisdictional dispute. Talks in Fiji in September between the United States and the South Pacific Forum nations made some progress toward an arrangement in which the United States--despite its stated position--would sanction the tuna industry's purchase of licenses good for all of the maritime economic zones of the Forum countries. Pending such an arrangement, the US tuna industry has worked out interim licensing agreements with individual or groups of countries in the area. [ ]

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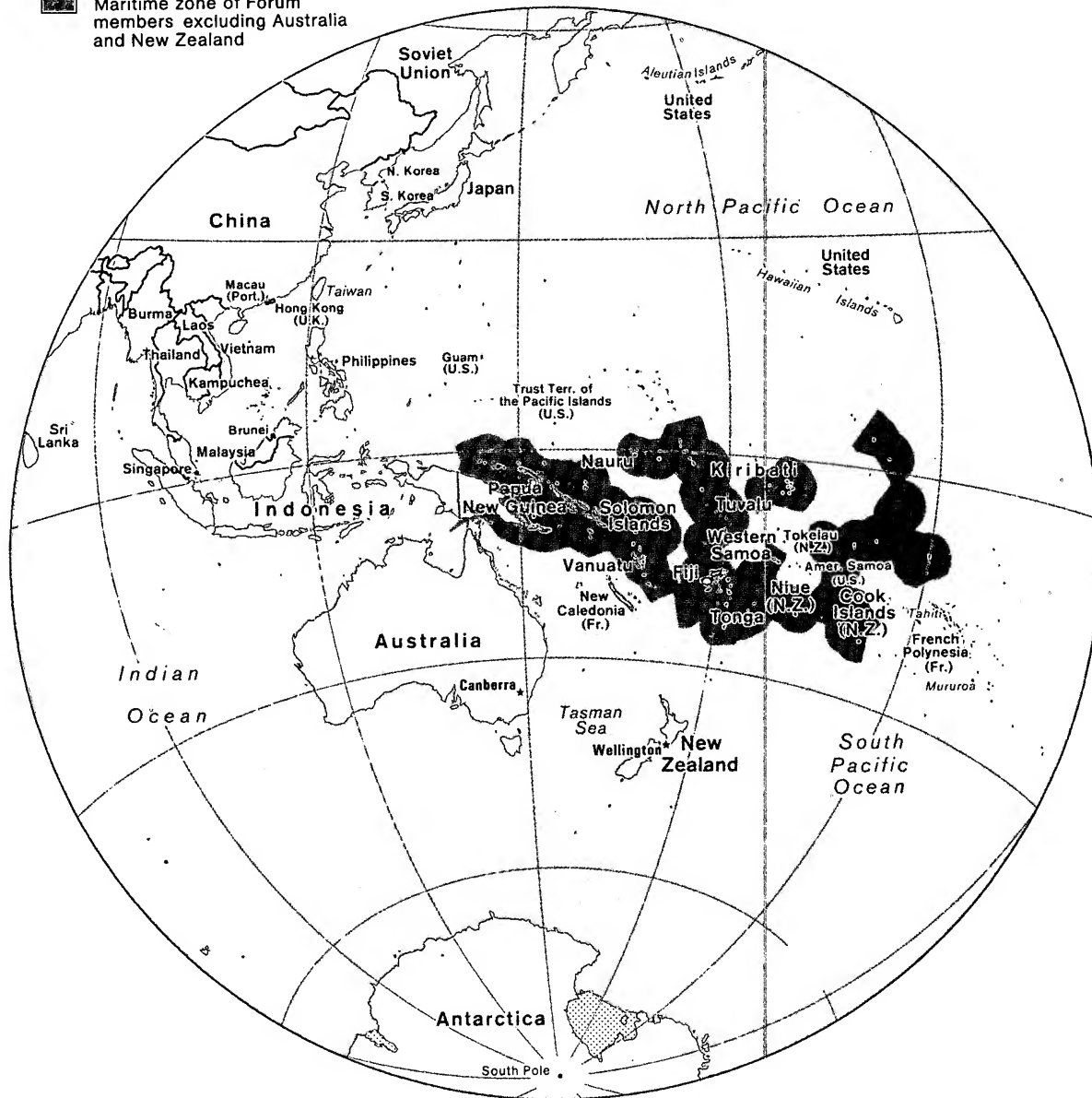
Attitudes Toward Nuclear Ship Visits at a Glance

Tonga	Solicits visits.
Fiji	Accepts visits, with cautious eye toward domestic antinuclear movement.
Western Samoa	Prime Minister Eti has declared free access, but no formal policy.
Papua New Guinea	Concern over New Zealand position has prompted Prime Minister Somare to express receptivity to visits despite concern over nuclear contamination.
Kiribati	Receptive to conventionally powered ships; might balk at nuclear visit.
Tuvalu	Would approve visit request, but reluctantly.
Nauru	Occasion for visit remote because of lack of port facilities.
Solomon Islands	Permission questionable in wake of tuna fishing dispute with United States.
Vanuatu	Absolute ban.

## South Pacific Forum

Tonga South Pacific Forum member

 Maritime zone of Forum members excluding Australia and New Zealand



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